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# Fighting the Soviet Imperialists:

In August 1984, I went for the third time into Afghanistan with the *mujaheddin*, Islamic guerrillas fighting to rid their country of its Soviet occupiers. I had started out, more than a year earlier, to observe firsthand the various Third World anti-Soviet guerrilla movements—in Central America, Africa, southeast Asia, and Afghanistan. My first and second trips inside Afghanistan with the *mujaheddin* had been in the late summer of 1983, and now, a year later, I was making my third trip with the Afghan guerrillas.

I traveled with the legendary commander Qari Baba from the country's southern border with Pakistan all the way up into the central Hazarajat mountains, then down to Ghazni, Afghanistan's fourth-largest city.

Qari Baba leads more than 9,000 *mujaheddin*, who love, fear, and revere him as if he were their own grandfather—and, indeed, the honorific *Baba* is an Afghan term of affection. (*Qari*, also spelled "Qali," is an Islamic title signifying one who has committed the entire Koran to memory.) A powerfully built man with a flowing black beard, medicine-ball stomach, and a huge bullet-shaped shaved skull, he looks like a cross between Genghis Khan and Buddha. Qari Baba has immense stature among the *mujaheddin* for having killed more Soviet soldiers than any other Afghan.

When we reached Ghazni, Qari Baba called in his principal commanders operating throughout the entire area to meet me. Early the next morning, Qari Baba, his personal bodyguard, and I sat on the floor of a home half bombed to rubble by Soviet MiGs. One by one, the field commanders arrived.

Each of these men had several hundred *mujaheddin* under his command, and they were all renowned as great fighters in their own right. All looked as if they had stepped out of an Errol Flynn movie, with their dark beards, turbans, flashing knives in scabbards of tooled leather, bandoliers full of gleaming brass cartridges, and their rifles—ranging from ancient Lee Enfield bolt-action carbines to modern Soviet Kalashnikov machine guns—intricately decorated with colorful beadwork. Each would take off his san-

## The New Liberation Movements

By Jack Wheeler

dals and lay down his weapon as he entered the room. They would shake my hand—Afghans love to shake hands—then sit down and fix their hawk-like eyes on me, sizing me up.

Tea was served, green tea from Chinese Turkestan, into which was heaped massive amounts of sugar. As always, when I asked that mine be *sheen trake*, without sugar, my hosts registered surprise. The talk was quiet and expectant as we waited for the last commanders to arrive. There was a stir at the door, and everyone stood up to warmly embrace a man introduced to me as Adam Khan.

As he sat down across from me and looked into my eyes, I recognized that even among this group, here was somebody special. His eyes were a fiery blue-green. His dark brown hair was unlike any Afghan's I'd ever seen, flowing and spilling down over his shoulders. An impish, devil-may-care grin was hidden under an enormous handlebar mustache. He carried himself with a graceful swagger that emanated confidence, power, and energy—the epitome of Afghan guerrilla charisma, just overflowing with it. As I looked back at him we both broke out into a big smile, taking an instant liking to each other.

I decided to tell Adam Khan and the others a story. "In my country, America," I told them through a local interpreter, Hakim, "there are stories and legends told about famous men who lived 100 years ago in western America. These men were called gunfighters, who

fought duels with six-guns on their belts, who fought outlaws and bandits and savage Indians. Many books have been written about them, many motion pictures in Hollywood have been made about them. They are among the great legendary heroes of my country, and they had names like Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, Bat Masterson, and John Wesley Hardin. But the most famous of all, the most legendary and heroic, the greatest American gunfighter of all of them was... *Wild Bill Hickock*.

"And you"—I turned and pointed at Adam Khan—"look just like *Wild Bill Hickock*!" Adam Khan instantly stood up and threw his arms around me. I had made a friend.

Each commander wanted to show me his area of operations, but Adam Khan clamored the loudest, and soon I was sitting behind him on his Yamaha dirt bike—the *mujaheddin* are becoming more motorized now—charging off to his village in the hills above Ghazni. We passed a number of villages on the valley floor that had been destroyed by *Shuravi* (Afghan for Soviet) tanks, jets, and helicopter gunships. Fields had been napalmed and cratered with 500-pound bombs. Wells, dikes, and irrigation canals lay demolished by pinpoint, low-level bombing runs, with the surrounding hundreds of formerly irrigated acres now returning to desert.

But for every destroyed village there was another being rebuilt, in which people were still living, still struggling to keep their home and traditional way of life. In adjacent fields, villagers were desperately trying to get in whatever harvest was left, threshing the grain with oxen or camels, pitchforking piles of it into the air to separate the chaff. Against such unarmed villagers, Soviet MiGs could fly at tree-top level and with impunity bomb anywhere they wanted to in the valley. Flying so low, they can't be heard until they are right on top of you.

Once, we stopped to fix the motorcycle just outside a village perched on a slight rise overlooking Ghazni. The airport was a few kilometers away, and we could see a swarm of helicopters returning from their morning forays. Hunched over the bike and concentrating on tightening the

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